



## **NHTSA'S FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) LOWER ANCHORS AND TETHERS FOR CHILDREN (LATCH)**

### **Q. What is LATCH?**

**A.** LATCH stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children. It is a system mandated by the Federal government in an effort to standardize and simplify the installation of child restraints without using the vehicle's seat belt system. New vehicles and child safety seats manufactured on and after September 1, 2002 will be equipped with the LATCH system. Cars, minivans, and light trucks will be required to have anchor points between the vehicle's seat cushion and the seat back in at least two rear seating positions, and a top tether anchor (with the exception of convertibles). Child safety seats will have a lower set of attachments that fasten to the vehicle anchors. Most forward-facing child safety seats will also have a top strap (tether) that attaches to the top anchor in the vehicle. Together they make up the LATCH system.

### **CHILD SAFETY SEAT-RELATED QUESTIONS:**

#### **1Q. How do I know if my child safety seat has LATCH attachments?**

**A.** LATCH attachments on child safety seats should be obvious on the product. These attachments may be flexible (a strap with a hook on the end) or rigid (an inflexible, firm bar with a connector on the end). The LATCH attachments will likely be (1) threaded through the path provided on the child safety seat that is to be used to secure the seat to the vehicle using the vehicle's belt system in non LATCH-equipped vehicles, or (2) attached to the lower portion of the child safety seat. Most forward-facing child safety seats will also have a top tether strap that attaches to the top anchor in the vehicle. Check the vehicle owner's manual and child restraint manufacturer's instructions.

#### **2Q. Can LATCH be used both rear- and forward-facing?**

**A.** Yes. Rear-facing infant-only child safety seats are required to have lower LATCH attachments. Forward-facing only and convertible child safety seats are required to have lower LATCH attachments and most will also have a top tether strap. If your child safety seat is a convertible seat, the LATCH system is designed to work in both rear- and forward-facing positions.

#### **3Q. Can my current non-LATCH child safety seat still be used?**

**A.** Yes. Non-LATCH child safety seats meet the same safety standards and are safe if they (a) are installed according to the vehicle owner's manual and child safety seat manufacturer's instructions, (b) haven't been recalled, and (c) haven't been damaged or in a crash. Child safety seats that don't have LATCH should be installed using seat belts, even in LATCH-equipped vehicles.

**4Q. Should I replace my current non-LATCH child safety seat with a new LATCH-equipped child safety seat?**

A. Your current non-LATCH child safety seat is still safe to use, even in a LATCH-equipped vehicle. There will be many different model LATCH child safety seats available on the market. Try a LATCH child safety seat in your vehicle before you buy it and see if you find it more convenient to install correctly. If you find it easier to install correctly, you may want to consider replacing your current child safety seat.

**5Q. My child uses a booster seat. Will I need the new LATCH system?**

A. No, LATCH isn't needed on these seats. LATCH is used only for rear-facing and forward-facing child safety seats. Because booster seats do not attach to the vehicle seat using the seat belt, they don't have the compatibility problems that the LATCH system resolves. NHTSA recommends that after children outgrow their forward-facing child safety seat they be restrained in a booster seat until they are at least 8 years old, unless they are 4'9."

**6Q: Are rigid LATCH attachments as safe as flexible LATCH attachments?**

A. They are required to meet the same safety performance standards.

**7Q. Can I use a lower LATCH attachment retrofit on my child safety seat?**

A. NHTSA does not test these retrofit systems in its compliance-testing program, so we have no policy on these systems. However, some child restraint manufacturers offer retrofit kits for lower LATCH attachments. If you choose to use a retrofit LATCH attachment kit, it is important to read the manufacturer's instructions to ensure that it can be used with your child seat model.

**8Q. A retailer is selling child safety seats without LATCH after the September 1, 2002 deadline. Is this legal?**

A. Yes. The requirement only applies to child safety seats manufactured on or after September 1, 2002. Seats manufactured before September 1, 2002—without the LATCH system—may still be sold.

**9Q. Who makes LATCH child safety seats and where can I buy one?**

A. Since the regulation notes that child safety seats manufactured after September 1, 2002 must be LATCH-equipped, all child safety seat manufacturers will be making LATCH-equipped child safety seats. The LATCH-equipped child safety seats will be available in the same stores (discount clubs, toy stores, specialty shops) that currently sell non-LATCH-equipped child safety seats.

**10Q. Are LATCH child safety seats readily available?**

A. LATCH child safety seats are being phased into the market. Most child restraint manufacturers are producing and shipping LATCH model child safety seats from August through October. Retailers are introducing LATCH-equipped child safety seats along with their current stock of non-LATCH-equipped child safety seats.

**11Q. What are the best LATCH child safety seats on the market?**

A. All child restraints must meet Federal safety performance standards, therefore the best LATCH child safety seat is going to be the one that is easiest for you to use properly and is used every trip. While all child safety seats must meet Federal safety standards, NHTSA has proposed

rating child safety seats for ease of use; how well they perform in a simulated crash test. NHTSA proposed providing the results of these ratings to the public, beginning in 2003. With these ratings we hope market forces will encourage manufacturers to design child restraints that are easier to use and provide additional safety performance above the standard.

#### **VEHICLE-RELATED QUESTIONS:**

##### **1Q. How do I know if my vehicle has LATCH anchors?**

**A.** The lower LATCH anchors in a vehicle will typically be visible in the 'seat bight' (the intersection of the seat cushion and seat back) or identified with a mark on the vehicle seat back. Top tether anchors, depending on whether you have a sedan, SUV, or minivan, may be located on the rear filler panel, on the back of or slightly under the rear vehicle seat or on the roof of the vehicle. If you're unsure if your vehicle has LATCH, check your vehicle owner's manual.

##### **2Q. What if I own a new LATCH-equipped vehicle? Do I have to buy a new child safety seat with LATCH?**

**A.** No, you can still use the vehicle seat belt system to secure your child safety seat to the vehicle, and it is still safe.

##### **3Q. What if I don't have a vehicle with LATCH?**

**A.** As of September 1, 2002, child safety seats are required to have both seat belt and LATCH options. Child safety seats, with a known history and if free of recalls, still can be safely and securely buckled into a vehicle using the vehicle's seat belt system. Have your child's safety seat inspected by a trained and certified technician for free, by calling toll-free 1-866-SEAT-CHECK or by logging onto: [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org) or call toll-free 1-888-327-4236 or logging onto <http://WWW.NHTSA.DOT.GOV> and clicking on the "child seat inspections" button.

##### **4Q. When will all vehicles have LATCH anchors?**

**A.** LATCH is required in passenger vehicles manufactured after September 1, 2002. LATCH was available on many vehicles before this date.

##### **5Q: Why aren't LATCH lower anchors provided for the rear center seat?**

**A.** Two pairs of LATCH lower anchors are required in the back seat of vehicles manufactured after September 1, 2002, and those anchors are required to be a specified distance apart for safety protection in a crash. Because of this required spacing between the lower anchorages, most vehicles do not have a rear seat that is wide enough to accommodate anchorages in the center seating position and in an adjacent outboard position. While lower anchorages are typically installed at outboard seating positions, most vehicles that have a center rear seating position without lower anchors also provide a top tether for additional safety benefit.

##### **6Q. Can I use the two inboard lower anchors (of the outboard LATCH seating positions) to install my child seat in the rear center seating position?**

**A.** No, unless both the child restraint manufacturer's instructions and the vehicle owner's manual specifically state that this is acceptable. A child restraint can be installed using the rear-center seat belt and, if forward-facing, the top tether anchor.

**7Q. Where is the best place for my child to be positioned in the vehicle?**

**A.** Children are always safest riding in the back seat. The best placement of a child safety seat is where it fits securely—whether that is in the left, right, or center position.

**8Q. Will there be LATCH anchors on airplanes?**

**A.** No. LATCH-equipped child safety seats can be installed on airplanes using the belt system.

**INSTALLATION-RELATED QUESTIONS:**

**1Q. Is LATCH safer than installing my child safety seat with a seat belt?**

**A.** A properly installed child restraint system and a LATCH system, without the use of the tether, offer the same levels of protection in a crash. Using the tether on either system improves overall effectiveness in reducing fatalities and injuries. LATCH was developed for improved ease-of-use and correct installation without using vehicle seat belts. LATCH anchors solve the challenges of vehicle seat belt incompatibilities from different types of vehicle seat contours, seat belt anchor locations, and seat belt locking mechanisms.

**2Q. Can I use a LATCH child safety seat in a vehicle without LATCH anchors?**

**A.** Yes. Any child safety seat, even one with LATCH can be safely installed using a seat belt and, if available for use with a forward-facing child safety seat, a top tether anchor. Be sure to follow the vehicle owner's manual and child safety seat manufacturer's instructions for correct installation and proper use.

**3Q. Do I need to use the vehicle seat belt along with LATCH to install my child safety seat?**

**A.** No. The safety standard does not require that both systems be used together. Child restraints are tested to ensure compliance with Federal safety standards when (1) attached to a vehicle using the LATCH system, and (2) attached using the vehicle belt system without LATCH. The LATCH system was designed to make child safety seat installation easier, without using seat belts.

**4Q. Now that I have a LATCH installation, I would like the seat belt out of the way. Can I buckle it up behind the child safety seat?**

**A.** Yes, as long as it does not interfere with a secure fit of the child safety seat and correct installation.

**5Q. If I have a LATCH-compatible vehicle and child safety seat, will that ensure I won't inadvertently misuse my child's safety seat?**

**A.** While the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that the LATCH system will reduce as much as half the misuse associated with improperly installing a child safety seat, LATCH does not eliminate all mistakes. Many other factors contribute to an increased risk of injury if a child is incorrectly secured when involved in a crash. For example: the child is not the appropriate age/weight/height for the child safety seat, the car seat harness straps are too loose, or the seat has been recalled, damaged, or involved in a crash, thus not giving the child adequate protection. It is best to have a trained and certified technician inspect your child safety seat and teach you the proper installation for your vehicle and child safety seat. Locate an inspection

location convenient to you by calling or logging onto SeatCheck (866-SEAT-CHECK, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org) or call toll-free 1-888-327-4236 or logging onto <http://WWW.NHTSA.DOT.GOV> and clicking on the "child seat inspections" button.) Indiana residents may call the Automotive Safety Program, at Riley Hospital, at 1-800-KID-N-CAR or log onto [www.preventinjury.org](http://www.preventinjury.org) to locate the closest permanent fitting station to you.

**6Q: How do I know that I have properly installed my LATCH seat?**

**A:** The rules for correct installation of LATCH seats are essentially the same as for non-LATCH child safety seats. A correctly installed LATCH seat will, as a general rule, not move more than one inch, when pulled, from side to side or from front to back. In addition, a secure fit for your child includes ensuring that the harness lies flat and snug across the child's chest and crotch areas.

**7Q. Can I install my forward-facing child safety seat using LATCH and then put the seat belt over my child in addition to using the child seat harness?**

**A.** No, unless specifically suggested by the child restraint manufacturer. LATCH was designed to be used independent of the vehicle seat belt. Always read and follow the vehicle owner's manual and child safety seat manufacturer's instructions for correct installation and proper use.

**8Q. Can I install my forward-facing child safety seat using LATCH and then put the seat belt over my child instead of using the child seat harness?**

**A.** No. The vehicle lap-shoulder belt, or lap belt only, is not a substitute for the child seat harness system. Read and follow the vehicle owner's manual and child safety seat manufacturer's instructions to determine if the child seat manufacturer suggests using LATCH as part of their combination harness-booster system, when the child restraint is used as a belt- positioning booster seat. In this mode, the seat belt is not used in place of a child seat harness.

**IMPORTANT REMINDERS:**

- Infants should ride facing the rear, correctly restrained, in a back seat position, until they are at least one year of age **and** at least 20-22 pounds.
- Always refer to your child safety seat manufacturer's and vehicle owner's instructions when installing a child safety seat, whether it is a LATCH-compatible seat or non-LATCH child safety seat.

To make sure your child is riding correctly on every trip, arrange to have your child safety seat inspected by a certified technician. To obtain contact information for a child safety seat inspection location near you, call toll-free 1-866-SEATCHECK or visit [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org) or call toll-free 1-888-327-4236 or log onto <http://WWW.NHTSA.DOT.GOV> and click on the "child seat inspections" button. Indiana residents may call the Automotive Safety Program, at Riley Hospital, at 1-800-KID-N-CAR or log onto [www.preventinjury.org](http://www.preventinjury.org) to locate the closest permanent fitting station to you.

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